How to Apply for IDRC Funding

Guidelines for Writing a Research Proposal

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Purpose of Pamphlet

How to Apply for IDRC Funding aims to help researchers interested in IDRC support to write a research proposal. It:

- outlines the process of preparing and submitting a proposal to IDRC;
- gives guidelines for the writing of a proposal; and
- includes criteria by which proposals are evaluated.

This pamphlet is designed to be used along with IDRC's general corporate brochure and with the program statement sheets issued by the Centre's divisions and regional offices. While these guidelines provide details on preparing a proposal, the corporate brochure and the program sheets outline the Centre's general objectives and the particular research priorities of each division and regional office.

How to Apply for IDRC Funding serves two types of readers; it provides a comprehensive guide for researchers who are approaching IDRC for the first time and a checklist for those who are familiar with the Centre and its policies.

The Proposal Process — An Overview

Introduction

The typical IDRC project begins with a letter from a researcher to a program officer about a research idea. If the project fits within IDRC's priorities and financial resources, the researcher will be asked to develop a full proposal. The proposal is commonly reviewed and revised several times — in consultation with IDRC staff — before the final version is submitted.

From proposal to project

The route from proposal to project typically passes through four stages:

Stage One — Conception

A two- to five-page letter outlining the research problem, scientific objectives, proposed methodology, estimated budget, and a plan for the use of research results is submitted to IDRC. This letter is in effect a preliminary proposal. Enough information must be in the letter for IDRC staff to assess the project. If the project looks promising, the researcher will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Preliminary proposals should be sent to an IDRC staff member at the relevant division or regional office.

Stage Two — Development of proposal

Program officers will talk with researchers at this stage to discuss the details of the proposal. A program officer is the sounding board for the researcher's ideas and a guide to IDRC policies and priorities. He or she may also help the researcher define a problem and decide on a methodology to reach the desired objectives.

Where essential, IDRC may provide funds for pre-project, research-related activities. Limited travel funds may be available for researchers in different locations to meet in order to finalize their joint submission. IDRC prefers that a Centre representative attend the meeting at which the proposal is discussed.

(A note on collaborative projects: In addition to funding projects proposed by individual research institutions, IDRC also supports collaborative projects. These are projects between developing country institutions and other institutions in the South or in Canada. Proposals for collaborative research can be developed in two ways — by the institution alone or jointly with its partner. Often, researchers in developing countries are the first to propose a cooperative project. At times, IDRC staff may be asked to suggest partners; a Canadian or developing country institution may suggest a project after contact with some other researchers in the South; or IDRC staff may recommend that collaboration would be useful.)

Stage Three — Submission and approval of proposal

Following the submission of a proposal that the program officer thinks is acceptable, he or she prepares a project appraisal. The appraisal is done according to a standard set of criteria that evaluates a project's scientific and technical merit as well as its potential development impact. This appraisal is submitted along with the proposal for approval. The length of the approval process depends on the size and complexity of the proposed project.

Stage Four — Start-up

If the proposal is approved, IDRC sends a Memorandum of Grant Conditions (MGC) to each recipient institution. The MGC is the formal agreement between IDRC and the institution(s) sponsoring the project. It stipulates the value and purpose of the grant, the terms of its administration, the project's objectives, the rights and obligations of all participants, and the formal starting date of the project. Funds can only be released after all the parties have signed the MGC and an official project starting date has been set.

Guide to Completing a Research Proposal

Introduction

IDRC supports research in several program areas. The following guidelines are therefore comprehensive, reflecting the objectives and funding criteria of all of IDRC's programs and divisions. Some categories of the guidelines may not apply to every project and can be omitted from the proposal.

The guidelines cover the following categories:

- Project overview
- Administrative information
- Background
- Objectives
- Methodology
- Users and beneficiaries
- Socio-economic analysis
- Ethical review
- Evaluation
- Institutions and personnel
- Timetable
- Training
- Dissemination of results/outputs
- Project administration and budget
- Appendices

Please note that gender and environmental issues do not have separate categories. As these issues may cut across several categories, they should be reflected in the proposal when they are applicable.

The proposal's maximum length can be discussed with the program officer. Generally, the Centre prefers that the total length of the research proposal, excluding appendices, not exceed 25 pages.

Project overview

Title — This should be a short phrase describing the subject of the proposal.

Estimated budget — Give an estimate of the total cost of the project in national currency.

Estimated duration — Indicate how long it will take to complete the entire project, including writing and submitting the final reports.

Objectives — Briefly note both the general and specific objectives of the project.

Abstract — A one-page summary of the problem, how it will be studied, the expected results, and how they will be used.

Administrative information

Research leader (principal investigator) — Name the person who would have the major responsibility for the technical and administrative aspects of the project. (In some cases, a project will have more than one leader.) The research leader should sign the application for funding as evidence of his/her request to have IDRC consider the proposal. Please include position title, address, work and home telephone numbers, cable/telex and fax numbers, and e-mail address (if available).

Recipient institution — Name the recipient institution (which should have the capacity to enter into contractual arrangements and assume legal obligations) and administrator of research funds. Include the institution's address and telephone, cable/telex, fax numbers, and e-mail address (as applicable). Please note that IDRC grants are only given to researchers affiliated with institutions.

Collaborating institution — In some cases, all or part of the research is carried out in an institution other than the recipient institution that administers the funds. Please give the names and addresses of any collaborating institutions.

Other donor agencies (if any) to share in funding this proposal — Provide the names and a description of the roles of other agencies, and if known, the amount of funds they will contribute.

Other donor agencies (if any) to whom this proposal was submitted for independent funding — Provide the name(s) of any other agency currently considering whether to fund this proposal.

Supporting administrative documents

- The institution's responsible officer should attach a **letter of formal request** for support from IDRC when the research proposal is submitted. (The responsible officer is that person who is authorized to submit official requests for funding on behalf of the institution, such as the rector or president of a university, head of a government department, or executive officer of a non-governmental organization.) In cases where the research leader and the responsible officer are the same, please have the responsible financial officer of the institution submit or co-sign the formal request.
- In cases where no previous collaboration has existed between the institution presenting the proposal and IDRC, a copy of the **document certifying the legal status of the institution** should be attached to the proposal.
- In cases where there are collaborating instituitions, please submit **a document certifying collaboration.**
- Many countries specify that requests for research funds from external sources need government approval, even if that funding is not going to a government institution. IDRC cannot fund any project until **a copy of the official approval document,** where such clearance is required, has been submitted. The IDRC program officer can determine whether such clearance is required.

BACKGROUND

This section should describe the problem that is to be investigated and the questions that will guide the research process. In addition to a clear, concise description of the problem, this section may discuss such points as:

- How the research relates to the development priorities of the country/countries concerned.
- What is the magnitude of the problem and how will the research results contribute to its solution?
- Why is the proposed research important and to whom?
- Does the project take into account the roles and perspectives of women? What will be the project's potential impact on women?
- What are the national, regional, and local contexts in which the research will take place?
- Will the project make an original contribution to the proposed field of research?
- Is the project related to any other activities that you or your institution have undertaken or plan to undertake?

Provide a brief overview of the literature and/or research done in the field related to the problem.

OBJECTIVES

General objective — A short statement on the ultimate goal of the research.

Specific objectives — List the precise objectives of the proposed research that the methodology will address.

METHODOLOGY

Organize the methodology so as to describe how each specific objective will be achieved. It is important to provide enough detail to enable an independent scientific assessment of the proposal.

Research tasks

- What are the hypotheses to be tested or the research questions to be answered? How will they be addressed?
- Who will do what? Will the ultimate users of the research results be involved in the research or in the activities aimed at putting the results to practical use? If so, when and how will they be involved?
- If the project is to be carried out with reference to a particular theory or model of development, provide the relevant details.

Study population and sampling

- Give detailed information on the study area. If the research is related to human populations, information on the study population should also be provided. Include a description of the procedures for selecting the population sample and the sample size. The survey sample should reflect ethical considerations and if applicable, an appropriate gender balance.
- If biological samples are to be collected, provide information on the number and type of samples, the method of collection, who will perform the collection, and how the samples will be transported, stored, and analyzed.

Data collection

- What approaches and methods will be used to collect primary and secondary information?
- Provide details on the methods to be used, such as questionnaires and group discussions. In the case of health-related projects, these methods could also include clinical examinations, experimental observations, and laboratory tests. Outline the procedures for the development, pretesting, and administering of any questionnaires.

Data analysis

- What types of analysis will be carried out?
- Describe the procedures for processing and analyzing the data. Will computer facilities be required? Who will provide data analysis services?
- What quality assurance procedures will be followed?

Laboratory procedures

- Standardized procedures and protocols must be stipulated (quote relevant references). Describe new or unique procedures in detail.
- What quality assurance procedures will be followed?

USERS AND BENEFICIARIES

This section should discuss how research results will be used. Discuss the immediate or intermediate users of the results and how they will be given access to them. Who will ultimately benefit if the project results are appropriately used?

The impact of research results can also be discussed in reference to:

- their potential use in other countries;
- the existing technical and scientific knowledge;
- the process of policy formulation and/or implementation;
- development processes at the local, national, and/or regional levels;
- the research capacity of the recipient institution; and
- issues of gender.

Outline any possible obstacles to the development of the research and to the eventual use of the results.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

If one of the project's objectives is to produce a prototype of a "hard" or "soft" technology and there are reasonable expectations that it will be widely distributed and/or marketed, the proposal should discuss the socio-economic implications, including, where applicable:

Demand and supply — the level of demand for the technology; marketing requirements; users' willingness or ability to pay; alternative sources of supply; price and quality competitiveness; input and credit availability; and pricing policies.

Profitability — the financial viability for entrepreneurs, farmers, or consumers; cost- effectiveness relative to alternatives.

Social impact — the impact on working conditions or quality of life; distribution of benefits between income classes and genders; degree and nature of local participation; effect on culture and values; long-term sustainability; and the costs and benefits to society (for example, implications for government subsidies, tariff protection, pollution, taxes, skill, employment generation, savings, etc.).

ETHICAL REVIEW

An institutional ethical body must approve protocols for projects that involve research on human subjects, the collection of private, personal information, or the participation of an individual in an experiment before the proposal is formally submitted to IDRC.

An independent ethical review committee, whether within the recipient institution or in the host country, ensures that the research undertaken is consistent with the highest ethical standards. These standards are designed to protect the dignity and integrity of those who are the subjects of research. Please attach a document certifying that ethical approval has been given. If the approval has not yet been given, estimate when it is expected.

For all protocols or projects involving research on human subjects:

- Indicate the benefits and any known risks or inconveniences to the subjects involved in the study.
- Describe precisely the information to be given to potential subjects of the study and whether it will be communicated orally or in writing. (Examples of such information include: aims of the research; any experimental procedures; any known short- or longer-term risks; possible discomfort; anticipated benefits from the procedures to the subject or others; expected duration of the study; alternative methods of treatment available if the study is a treatment procedure; and the freedom of the subject to withdraw from the study at any time.)

  If a written consent form is to be used, attach a sample. Include the name(s) and status of the project staff member(s) who give(s) this information to potential subjects and who ascertain(s) that it is understood and that the consent is freely given.
- Indicate any special incentives or treatment the subjects will receive for their participation (e.g. money for transportation, stipends for participation, food or medication, etc.). Whenever payment is involved, specify the amount, manner, reason why payment is required, and timing.
- Indicate how the confidentiality will be maintained of all information relating to participants obtained during the study.
- List all drugs, vaccines, diagnostic or other procedures or instruments to be administered, regardless of whether these are registered, unregistered, new or already in current use, in the country in question or elsewhere. State the

manufacturers of each compound, vaccine or agent.

Other potential ethical concerns:

- For projects in which personal information will be collected, provide details on how the information will be kept confidential.
- For projects that involve individuals participating in an experiment (such as farmers testing a new farming practice or community members responding to group questioning), provide information on the free consent of participants and how it will be obtained.
- Outline how research findings will be reported back to the people concerned.
- State whether the research will raise ethical issues related to the way resources are shared.
- Indicate how gender inequities and imbalances may affect women's ability to control their involvement in the research process.

EVALUATION

Certain projects benefit from more extensive evaluation than that which comes with normal management and monitoring. Such cases include projects that are particularly innovative or risky, those from which significant lessons can be learned, and those that require a very high level of accountability.

Indicate if the project will include an explicit evaluation component. A description of the evaluation component should:

- clearly identify who will use the evaluation findings and for what purpose(s);
- focus on a few specific issues that are well defined and relate directly to the project's objectives and activities;
- specify the methods by which data will be collected; and

- identify both the resources necessary for the evaluation and the person responsible for its implementation.

INSTITUTIONS AND PERSONNEL

Institutions

- Briefly describe the research institution, including its history and objectives. Similarly, provide information on collaborating agencies and those institutions or agencies that have been involved in planning the research, will be involved in carrying it out, and/or will be asked for funds.
- Highlight the particular strengths or past achievements of the institution.
- Describe previous or on-going support to the person, unit, or institution in the field of research related to the proposal. How might the proposed research complement the institution's existing program?

Personnel

- List the personnel who will be involved in carrying out the project, their roles, and their time commitments. Describe their qualifications, experience, or any other relevant information. Include the resumes of the principal professional staff.

Collaborative projects with Canadian institutions

- Outline reasons for collaboration with Canadian scientists.
- How will the cooperation between Canadian researchers and researchers in developing countries be organized? What will be the division of labour?

Note: Collaborative projects with Canadian institutions are designed to promote access by developing countries to research strengths in Canada; they are

neither aimed at providing new research capacity in Canada nor at financing technical assistance.

TIMETABLE

Indicate the time needed to carry out each principal phase of the project, as well as the project's total duration. Remember to take into account the time required for staff recruitment and equipment purchases. Indicate possible constraints in adhering to the timetable.

TRAINING

Identify how the project might contribute to the training of staff, and whether it would be necessary for certain staff to undergo training prior to or during the project. What kinds of training would be most appropriate (e.g. formal graduate training, non-formal skills upgrading course, visits or missions, etc.) and how it would be organized?

DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS/OUTPUTS

Outline plans for disseminating or implementing the findings of the proposed research. How will research results be communicated to decision-makers? Include plans for any seminars, workshops, presentations, or publications.

Detail the expected outputs of a project, such as a report, a new methodology or technology, and/or scientific articles.

A note on intellectual property:

Research inevitably leads to the creation of intellectual property. Centre policy is that written materials and documentation are owned by their creator, who also holds copyright. The Centre, however, seeks the right to disseminate the information so that the benefits of the research will be circulated as widely as possible.

If a technology is developed during a project, the Centre's main objective is to ensure its dissemination and utilization. The Centre will therefore own the patent in the technology but most of the revenues from the technology will go to the grant recipient. In some cases, the Centre will seek a share of the revenues, taking into account the investment it made in the research and marketing of the technology and the recipient's own financial and technical contribution.

It is the Centre's policy to recoup any grant given to a private sector company if the technology it develops is successful.

If improved germplasm is developed in a project, the Centre requires that it be made freely available to others on the understanding that they will not subsequently try to acquire ownership rights to the material.

(The Centre's patent policy is currently under review. Please check with the program officer for the latest developments.)

PROJECT ADMINISTRATION AND BUDGET

Estimate the project's total costs, indicating the yearly contributions to be made by each institution or agency involved. Allow for inflation and indicate the level of inflation used in the estimate. All budget items must be quoted in national currencies.

The budget should be divided into two categories, the ***IDRC contribution*** and the ***local (recipient) contribution.*** The local contribution can be an estimate of "in kind" resources such as salaries, equipment etc. The budget estimates should be computed on an annual basis. The following are brief descriptions of IDRC's standard budget categories. More details on budget preparation and reporting can be found in *How to Administer Projects: A Guide to IDRC's Financial Procedures*.

Salaries

Salaries include all remuneration, allowances, and benefits paid to recipient project staff and to project advisors hired for a specific project. Project advisors are those people hired for fairly long periods and paid regular sums. IDRC does not generally permit gratuities for existing staff.

Research Expenses

Research expenses encompass services and materials (including reference materials) required to carry out the research.

Capital Equipment

This category covers equipment purchased by either the recipient, or IDRC on behalf of the recipient, that has a useful life of more than one year and costs over 1,000 CAD per item.

Conferences

This category covers the costs of attending project-related seminars, meetings, and conferences that may be organized by the recipient. This category does not cover the cost of conferences held specifically to disseminate IDRC research results. These activities are to be reported under Dissemination.

Consultants

This category covers all expenses related to acquiring the services of a consultant for a specific activity within the project. The consultant should provide expert professional advice to project staff. He or she usually works on a "fee for service" basis. Compared with project advisors (see Salaries), consultants are contracted for shorter periods to work on specific assignments.

Training

This covers a trainee's registration and tuition fees, living and other allowances, research and training expenses, and travel costs during his or her participation in degree or diploma programs, short courses, student field work, post-doctoral training, or other scholarly activities.

Training for project staff that relates to the implementation of research activities should be shown under "research expenses."

Travel

This covers costs incurred by project staff outside the local research area. (All local travel is to be reported under Research Expenses.)

Dissemination

This budget category covers all IDRC dissemination activities. It includes the costs of project-related seminars, meetings or conferences that may be organized by the recipient for the purpose of disseminating IDRC-funded research results.

Support Services

Support services should only encompass those administrative costs that are not directly related to research. They can include such items as clerical, accounting, or secretarial help, general office expenses, office accommodation, rent, and utility charges, etc.

Overhead

The Centre expects the recipient to absorb the overhead or administrative costs of a project as part of its local contribution. If the recipient will not or cannot do so, IDRC will contribute overhead costs up to a maximum of 13% of all recipient-administered costs, excluding capital equipment costs.

Coordination

This category covers expenses related to the coordination of a project, whether it is a network covering recipient institutions in several countries, several institutions within a country, or several components (or sub-projects) within an institution. The

coordination function involves overseeing the various components of a project to ensure that all concerned follow the same objectives and approaches, including budgetary monitoring.

Note: A budget note is required for each line item in the budget. The budget notes should state exactly what is covered under the heading and the basis on which the budgeted amount was calculated.

Appendices

Attach any supporting documents such as maps, the resumes of personnel, bibliographies, etc.

Evaluation of Proposals

A proposal is evaluated according to a wide range of criteria that assess a project's scientific and technical merit and its potential impact on development problems. These criteria reflect both the Centre's overall objectives and the different priorities of its divisions and regional offices. In a document of this length, it is impossible to list all these criteria. Funding applicants should therefore consult the Centre's corporate brochure and the program statement sheets for details on IDRC's research priorities. There are, however, some questions that are typically asked of all proposals. These fall into the following categories:

Development relevance: Is the proposal consistent with development goals that have been identified by policymakers in the country or countries where the project will take place? Is the project likely to receive government clearance in the developing country or countries involved? Does it have a practical focus on specific development issues or goals?

Application of results: Are the methods and approaches used appropriate to the personnel and facilities available to conduct the research? Are the research findings likely to be applicable in developing countries or regions other than the one in which the research takes place? Will the results or applications of the project be easily disseminated or replicated? Are there effective measures taken to ensure utilization of results? Does the project have the potential to influence larger development agendas?

General capacity building: Will the project strengthen national or regional capacities? Will it contribute to the development and management of local human and technical resources? Does the project promote sustainability and South-South cooperation?

Institutional capacity building: Do all the institutions involved in the project support it and in what way? Do the participating institutions have the

capacity to undertake the project? Will the project make the fullest possible use of local resources and researchers from the region? Will the recipient institution be strengthened as a result of the project? Will it be able to sustain the activity when IDRC support is over?

Scientific and technical merit: Is the problem clearly identified? Are the proposed methods well-defined? Are they sound and appropriate? Is the timetable realistic?

Environmental impact: Will the process of doing research cause disruptions to human or other eco-systems? If so, are there mitigating factors? What are the environmental implications if the research is successful and applied?

Gender considerations: Do the design and methodology of the project take into account different gender roles, perspectives, interests, and priorities? Is the project's potential impact assessed from a perspective that recognizes gender inequalities and imbalances? Will data be broken down by sex? Do the project's capacity building features reflect gender considerations?

Ethical considerations: Are the people who will be involved in the research process adequately protected? Will the research have a real impact on poor and generally disadvantaged people?

Collaborative projects: Are the research partners in a cooperative project likely to work well together?

Final Note

Please remember that these guidelines are comprehensive and reflect the diversity of IDRC's programs and activities. Your proposal need only address those categories of the guidelines that apply to your project.

IDRC wishes you every success in developing your research proposal. If you need further information, do not hesitate to contact Centre staff in Ottawa or at one of the regional offices.

Head Office
IDRC, PO Box 8500, Ottawa, CANADA K1G 3H9

Southeast and East Asia
IDRC, Tanglin PO Box 101, Singapore 9124,
REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

Eastern and Southern Africa
IDRC, PO Box 62084, Nairobi, KENYA

West and Central Africa
IDRC, BP 11007, CD Annexe,
Dakar, SENEGAL

Latin America and the Caribbean
IDRC, Casilla de Correos 6379,
Montevideo, URUGUAY

South Asia
IDRC, 17 Jor Bagh, New Delhi 110003, INDIA

Middle East and North Africa
IDRC, PO Box 14 Orman, Giza, Cairo, EGYPT

Southern Africa
IDRC, Ninth Floor Braamfontein Centre,
Corner Bertha and Jorissen Streets,
Braamfontein, 2001 Johannesburg,
SOUTH AFRICA